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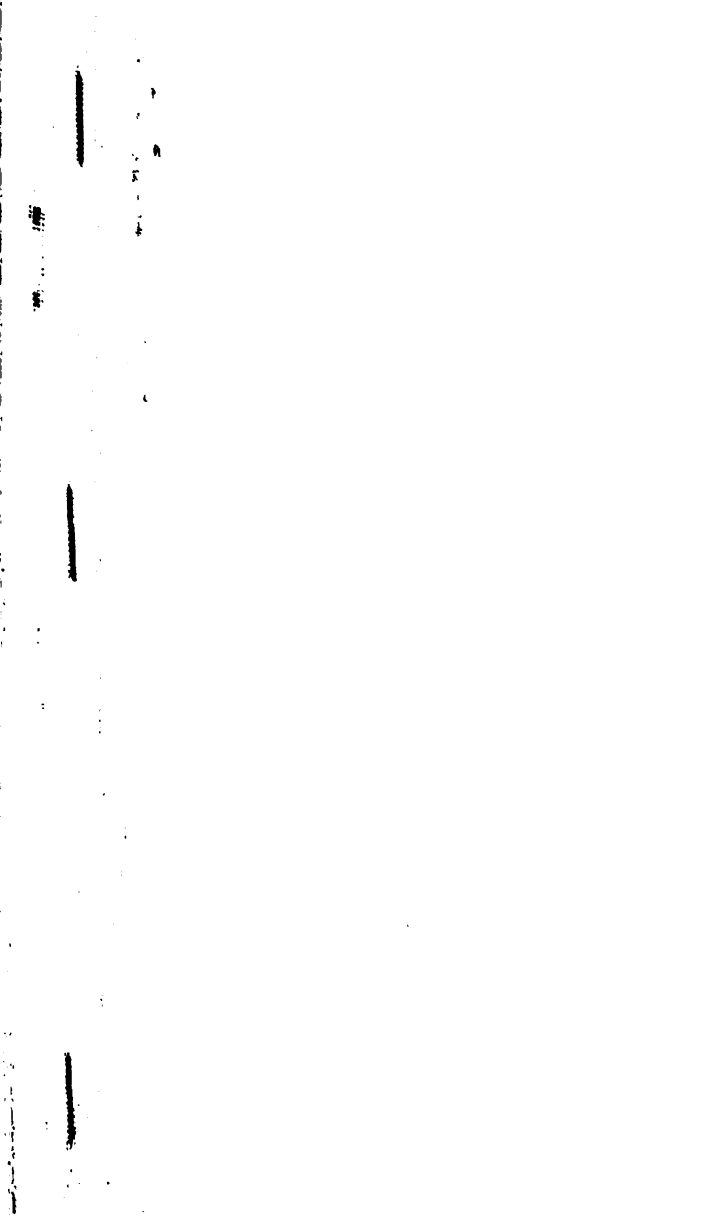
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THE
CHARACTER
OF
W. COBBETT, M. P.
BY
WILLIAM HAZLITT.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,
SEVERAL INTERESTING PARTICULARS OF MR. COBBETT'S
LIFE AND WRITINGS.

"Take this self-taught peasant for all in all, he was a more extraordinary Englishman than any other of his time."—TIMES.

London :

J. WATSON, 18, COMMERCIAL PLACE, CITY ROAD,
FINSBURY.

1835.

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CHARACTER
OF
WILLIAM COBBETT, M. P.

PEOPLE have about as substantial an idea of Cobbett as they have of Cribb. His blows are as hard, and he himself is as impenetrable. One has no notion of him as making use of a fine pen, but a great mutton-fist; his style stuns his readers, and he "fillips the ear of the public with a three-man beetle." He is too much for any single newspaper antagonist; "lays waste" a city orator or Member of Parliament, and bears hard upon the government itself. He is a kind of *fourth estate* in the politics of the country. He is not only unquestionably the most powerful political writer of the present day, but one of the best writers in the language. He speaks and thinks plain, broad, downright English. He might be said to have the clearness of Swift, the naturalness of Defoe, and the picturesque satirical description of Mandeville; if all such comparisons were not impertinent. A really great and original writer is like nobody but himself. In one sense, Sterne was not a wit, nor Shakespeare a poet. It is easy to describe second-rate talents, because they fall into a class, and enlist under a standard: but first rate powers defy calculation or comparison, and can be defined only by themselves. They are *sui generis*, and make the class to which they belong. I have tried half a dozen times to describe Burke's style without ever succeeding; its severe extravagance; its literal boldness; its matter-of-fact hyperboles; its running away with a subject, and from it at the same time—but there is no making it out, for there is no example of the same thing any where else. We have no common measure to refer to; and his qualities contradict even themselves.

Cobbett is not so difficult. He has been compared to Paine; and so far it is true there are no two writers who come more into juxta-position from the nature of their subjects, from the internal resources on which they draw, and from the popular

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effect of their writings, and their adaptation (though that is a bad word in the present case) to the capacity of every reader. But still if we turn to a volume of Paine's (his *Common Sense* or *Rights of Man*), we are struck (not to say somewhat refreshed) by the difference. Paine is a much more sententious writer than Cobbett. You cannot open a page in any of his best and earlier works without meeting with some maxim, some antithetical and memorable saying, which is a sort of starting-place for the argument, and the goal to which it returns. There is not a single *bon-mot*, a single sentence in Cobbett that has ever been quoted again. If any thing is ever quoted from him, it is an epithet of abuse or a nickname. He is an excellent hand at invention in that way, and has "damnable iteration in him." What could be better than his pestering Erskine year after year with his second title of Baron Clackmannan? He is rather too fond of *the Sons and Daughters of Corruption*. Paine affected to reduce things to first principles, to announce self-evident truths. Cobbett troubles himself about little but the details and local circumstances. The first appeared to have made up his mind before-hand to certain opinions, and to try to find the most compendious and pointed expressions for them: his successor appears to have no clue, no fixed or leading principles, nor ever to have thought on a question till he sits down to write about it; but then there seems no end of his matters of fact and raw materials, which are brought out in all their strength and sharpness from not having been squared or frittered down or vamped up to suit a theory—he goes on with his descriptions and illustrations as if he would never come to a stop; they have all the force of novelty with all the familiarity of old acquaintance; his knowledge grows out of the subject, and his style is that of a man who has an absolute intuition of what he is talking about, and never thinks of any thing else. He deals in premises and speaks to evidence—the coming to a conclusion and summing up (which was Paine's *forte*) lies in a smaller compass. The one could not compose an elementary treatise on politics to become a manual for the popular reader; nor could the other in all probability have kept up a weekly journal for the same number of years with the same spirit, interest, and untired perseverance. Paine's writings are a sort of introduction to political arithmetic on a new plan: Cobbett keeps a day-book and makes an entry at full of all the occurrences and troublesome questions that start up throughout the year. Cobbett with vast industry, vast information, and the utmost power of making what he says intelligible, never seems to get at the beginning or come to the end of any question: Paine, in a

few short sentences seems by his peremptory manner "to clear it from all controversy, past, present, and to come." Paine takes a bird's-eye view of things. Cobbett sticks close to them, inspects the component parts, and keeps fast hold of the smallest advantages they afford him. Or if I might here be indulged in a pastoral allusion, Paine tries to inclose his ideas in a fold for security and repose: Cobbett lets *his* pour out upon the plain like a flock of sheep to feed and batten. Cobbett is a pleasanter writer for those to read who do not agree with him; for he is less dogmatical, goes more into the common grounds of fact and argument to which all appeal, is more desultory and various, and appears less to be driving at a previous conclusion than urged on by the force of present conviction. He is therefore tolerated by all parties, though he has made himself by turns obnoxious to all; and even those he abuses read him. The Reformers read him when he was a Tory, and the Tories read him now that he is a Reformer. He must, I think, however, be *caviare* to the Whigs.*

If he is less metaphysical and poetical than his celebrated prototype, he is more picturesque and dramatic. His episodes, which are numerous as they are pertinent, are striking, interesting, full of life and *naïveté*, minute, double measure running over, but never tedious—*nunquam sufflammandus erat*. He is one of those writers who can never tire us, not even of himself; and the reason is, he is always "full of matter." He never runs to lees, never gives us the vapid leavings of himself, is never "weary, stale, and unprofitable," but always setting out afresh on his journey, clearing away some old nuisance, and turning up new mould. His egotism is delightful, for there is no affectation in it. He does not talk of himself for lack of something to write about, but because some circumstance that has happened to himself is the best possible illustration of the subject, and he is not the man to shrink from giving the best possible illustration of the subject from a squeamish delicacy. He likes both himself and his subject too well. He does not put himself before it, and say—"admire me first"—but places us in the same situation with himself, and makes us see all that he does. There is no blindman's-buff, no conscious hints, no awkward ventriloquism, no testimonies of applause, no abstract senseless self-complacency, no smuggled admiration of his own person by proxy: it is all plain and above-board. He writes himself plain William Cobbett, strips himself quite as naked,

* The late Lord Thurlow used to say that Cobbett was the only writer that deserved the name of a political reasoner.

as any body would wish—in a word, his egotism is full of individuality, and has room for very little vanity in it. We feel delighted, rub our hands, and draw our chair to the fire, when we come to a passage of this sort: we know it will be something new and good, manly and simple, not the same insipid story of self over again. We sit down at table with the writer, but it is to a course of rich viands, flesh, fish, and wild-fowl, and not to a nominal entertainment, like that given by the Barmecide in the Arabian Nights, who put off his visitors with calling for a number of exquisite things that never appeared, and with the honour of his company. Mr. Cobbett is not a *make-believe* writer. His worst enemy cannot say that of him. Still less is he a vulgar one. He must be a puny, common-place critic indeed, who thinks him so. How fine were the graphical descriptions he sent us from America: what a transatlantic flavour, what a native *gusto*, what a fine *sauce-piquante* of contempt they were seasoned with! If he had sat down to look at himself in the glass, instead of looking about him like Adam in Paradise, he would not have got up these articles in so capital a style. What a noble account of his first breakfast after his arrival in America! It might serve for a month. There is no scene on the stage more amusing. How well he paints the gold and scarlet plumage of the American birds, only to lament more pathetically the want of the wild wood-notes of his native land! The groves of the Ohio that had just fallen beneath the axe's stroke "live in his description," and the turnips that he transplanted from Botley "look green" in prose! How well at another time he describes the poor sheep that had got the tick, and had tumbled down in the agonies of death! It is a portrait in the manner of Bewick, with the strength, the simplicity, and feeling of that great naturalist. What havoc he makes, when he pleases, of the curls of Dr. Parr's wig and of the Whig consistency of Mr. ———! His grammar too is as entertaining as a story-book. He is too hard upon the style of others, and not enough (sometimes) on his own.

As a political partisan, no one can stand against him. With his brandished club, like Giant Despair in the Pilgrim's Progress, he knocks out their brains; and not only no individual, but no corrupt system could hold out against his powerful and repeated attacks, but with the same weapon, swung round like a flail, that he levels his antagonists, he lays his friends low, and puts his own party *hors de combat*. This is a bad propensity, and a worse principle in political tactics, though a common one. If his blows were straight forward and steadily directed to the same object, no unpopular Minister could live before

him; instead of which he lays about right and left, impartially and remorselessly, makes a clear stage, has all the ring to himself, and then runs out of it, just when he should stand his ground. He throws his head into his adversary's stomach, and takes away from him all inclination for the fight, hits fair or foul, strikes at every thing, and as you come up to his aid or stand ready to pursue his advantage, trips up your heels or lays you sprawling, and pummels you when down as much to his heart's content as ever the Yanguesian carriers belaboured Rosinante with their pack-staves. "*He has the back-trick simply the best of any man in Illyria.*" He pays off both scores of old friendship and new-acquired enmity in a breath, in one perpetual volley, one raking fire of "arrowy sleet" shot from his pen. However his own reputation or the cause may suffer in consequence, he cares not one pin about that, so that he disables all who oppose, or who pretend to help him. In fact, he cannot bear success of any kind, not even of his own views or party; and if any principle were likely to become popular, would turn round against it to shew his power in shouldering it on one side. In short, wherever power is, there is he against it: he naturally butts at all obstacles, as unicorns are attracted to oak-trees, and feels his own strength only by resistance to the opinions and wishes of the rest of the world. To sail with the stream, to agree with the company, is not his humour. If he could bring about a Reform in Parliament, the odds are that he would instantly fall foul of and try to mar his own handy-work; and he quarrels with his own creatures as soon as he has written them into a little vogue—and a prison. I do not think this is vanity or fickleness so much as a pugnacious disposition, that must have an antagonist power to contend with, and only finds itself at ease in systematic opposition. If it were not for this, the high towers and rotten places of the world would fall before the battering-ram of his hard-headed reasoning: but if he once found them tottering, he would apply his strength to prop them up, and disappoint the expectations of his followers. He cannot agree to anything established, nor to set up anything else in its stead. While it is established, he presses hard against it, because it presses upon him, at least in imagination. Let it crumble under his grasp, and the motive to resistance is gone. He then requires some other grievance to set his face against. His principle is repulsion, his nature contradiction: he is made up of mere antipathies, an Ishmaelite indeed without a fellow. He is always playing at *hunt the slipper* in politics. He turns round upon whoever is next him. The way to wean him from any opinion, and make him conceive an intolerable hatred

against it, would be to place somebody near him who was perpetually dinning it in his ears. When he is in England, he does nothing but abuse the Boroughmongers, and laugh at the whole system: when he is in America, he grows impatient of freedom and a republic. If he had staid there a little longer, he would have become a loyal and a loving subject of his Majesty King George IV. He lampooned the French Revolution when it was hailed as the dawn of liberty by millions: by the time it was brought into almost universal ill-odour by some means or other (partly no doubt by himself) he had turned, with one or two or three others, staunch Buonapartist. He is always of the militant, not of the triumphant party: so far he bears a gallant shew of magnanimity; but his gallantry is hardly of the right stamp. It wants principle: for though he is not servile or mercenary, he is the victim of self-will. He must pull down and pull in pieces: it is not his disposition to do otherwise. It is a pity; for with his great talents he might do great things, if he would go right forward to any useful object, make thorough-stitch work of any question, or join hand and heart with any principle. He changes his opinions as he does his friends, and much on the same account. He has no comfort in fixed principles: as soon as any thing is settled in his own mind, he quarrels with it. He has no satisfaction but in the chase after truth, runs a question down, worries and kills it, then quits it like vermin, and starts some new game, to lead him a new dance, and give him a fresh breathing through bog and brake, with the rabble yelping at his heels, and the leaders perpetually at fault. This he calls sport-royal. He thinks it as good as cudgel-playing or single-stick, or any thing else that has life in it. He likes the cut and thrust, the falls, bruises, and dry blows of an argument: as to any good or useful results that may come of the amicable settling of it, any one is welcome to them for him. The amusement is over, when the matter is once fairly decided.

There is another point of view in which this may be put. I might say that Mr. Cobbett is a very honest man with a total want of principle, and I might explain this paradox thus. I mean that he is, I think, in downright earnest in what he says, in the part he takes at the time; but in taking that part, he is led entirely by headstrong obstinacy, caprice, novelty, pique or personal motive of some sort, and not by a stedfast regard for truth, or habitual anxiety for what is right uppermost in his mind. He is not a fee'd, time-serving, shuffling advocate (no man could write as he does who did not believe himself sincere)—but his understanding is the dupe and slave of his momentary, violent, and irritable humours. He does not adopt

an opinion "deliberately or for money;" yet his conscience is at the mercy of the first provocation he receives, of the first whim he takes in his head; he sees things through the medium of heat and passion, not with reference to any general principles, and his whole system of thinking is deranged by the first object that strikes his fancy or sours his temper.—One cause of this phenomena is perhaps his want of a regular education. He is a self-taught man, and has the faults as well as excellences of that class of persons in their most striking and glaring excess. It must be acknowledged that the Editor of the Political Register (the *twopenny trash*, as it was called, till a bill passed the house to raise the price to sixpence) is not "the gentleman and scholar:" though he has qualities that, with a little better management, would be worth (to the public) both those titles. For want of knowing what has been discovered before him, he has not certain general landmarks to refer to, or a general standard of thought to apply to individual cases. He relies on his own acuteness and the immediate evidence, without being acquainted with the comparative anatomy or philosophical structure of opinion. He does not view things on a large scale or at the horizon (dim and airy enough perhaps)—but as they affect himself, close, palpable, tangible. Whatever he finds out, is his own, and he only knows what he finds out. He is in the constant hurry and fever of gestation: his brain teems incessantly with some fresh project. Every new light is the birth of a new system, the dawn of a new world to him. He is continually outstripping and overreaching himself. The last opinion is the only true one. He is wiser to-day than he was yesterday. Why should he not be wiser to-morrow than he was to-day? Men of a learned education are not so sharp-witted as clever men without it: but they know the balance of the human intellect better; if they are more stupid, they are more steady; and are less liable to be led astray by their own sagacity and the over-weening petulance of hard-earned and late-acquired wisdom. They do not fall in love with every meretricious extravagance at first sight, or mistake an old battered hypothesis for a vestal, because they are new to the ways of this old world. They do not seize upon it as a prize, but are safe from gross imposition by being as wise and no wiser than those who went before them.

Paine said on some occasion—"What I have written, I have written"—as rendering any farther declaration of his principles unnecessary. Not so Mr. Cobbett. What he has written is no rule to him what he is to write. He learns something every day, and every week he takes the field to maintain the opini-

ons of the last six days against friend or foe. I doubt whether this outrageous inconsistency, this headstrong fickleness, this understood want of all rule and method, does not enable him to go on with the spirit, vigour, and variety that he does. He is not pledged to repeat himself. Every new Register is a kind of new Prospectus. He blesses himself from all ties and shackles on his understanding; he has no mortgages on his brain; his notions are free and unincumbered. If he was put in trammels, he might become a vile hack like so many more. But he gives himself "ample scope and verge enough." He takes both sides of a question, and maintains one as sturdily as the other. If nobody else can argue against him, he is a very good match for himself. He writes better in favour of Reform than any body else; he used to write better against it. Wherever he is, there is the tug of war, the weight of the argument, the strength of abuse. He is not like a man in danger of being *bed-rid* in his faculties—He tosses and tumbles about his unwieldy bulk, and when he is tired of lying on one side, relieves himself by turning on the other. His shifting his point of view from time to time not merely adds variety and greater compass to his topics (so that the Political Register is an armoury and magazine for all the materials and weapons of political warfare), but it gives a greater zest and liveliness to his manner of treating them. Mr. Cobbett takes nothing for granted as what he has proved before; he does not write a book of reference. We see his ideas in their first concoction, fermenting and overflowing with the ebullitions of a lively conception. We look on at the actual process, and are put in immediate possession of the grounds and materials on which he forms his sanguine, unsettled conclusions. He does not give us samples of reasoning, but the whole solid mass, refuse and all.

—"He pours out all as plain
As downright Shippen or as old Montaigne."

This is one cause of the clearness and force of his writings. An argument does not stop to stagnate and muddle in his brain, but passes at once to his paper. His ideas are served up, like pancakes hot and hot. Fresh theories gives him fresh courage. He is like a young and lusty bridegroom that divorces a favourite speculation every morning, and marries a new one every night. He is not wedded to his notions, not he. He has not one Mrs. Cobbett among all his opinions. He makes the most of the last thought that has come in his way, seizes fast hold of it, rumpled it about in all directions with rough strong hands, has his wicked will of it, takes a surfeit, and throws it away.—

Our author's changing his opinions for new ones is not so wonderful: what is more remarkable is his facility in forgetting his old ones. He does not pretend to consistency (like Mr. Coleridge); he frankly disavows all connexion with himself. He feels no personal responsibility in this way, and cuts a friend or principle with the same decided indifference that Antipholus of Ephesus cuts Ægeon of Syracuse. It is a hollow thing. The only time he ever grew romantic was in bringing over the relics of Mr. Thomas Paine with him from America to go a progress with them through the disaffected districts. Scarce had he landed in Liverpool when he left the bones of a great man to shift for themselves; and no sooner did he arrive in London than he made a speech to disclaim all participation in the political and theological sentiments of his late idol, and to place the whole stock of his admiration and enthusiasm towards him to the account of his financial speculations, and of his having predicted the fate of paper-money. If he had erected a little gold statue to him, it might have proved the sincerity of this assertion: but to make a martyr and a patron-saint of a man, and to dig up "his canonised bones" in order to expose them as objects of devotion to the rabble's gaze, asks something that has more life and spirit in it, more mind and vivifying soul, than has to do with any calculation of pounds, shillings, and pence! The fact is, he *ratted* from his own project. He found the thing not so ripe as he had expected. His heart failed him: his enthusiasm fled, and he made his retractation. His admiration is short-lived: his contempt only is rooted, and his resentment lasting.—The above was only one instance of his building too much on practical *data*. He has an ill habit of prophesying, and goes on though still deceived. The art of prophesying, does not suit Mr. Cobbett's style. He has a knack of fixing names and time and places. According to him, the Reformed Parliament was to meet in March, 1818—it did not, and we heard no more of the matter. When his predictions fail, he takes no farther notice of them, but applies himself to new ones—like the country-people who turn to see what weather there is in the almanac for the next week, though it has been out in its reckoning every day of the last.

Mr. Cobbett is great in attack, not in defence: he cannot fight an up-hill battle. He will not bear the least punishing. If any one turns upon him (which few people like to do) he immediately turns tail. Like an overgrown school-boy, he is so used to have it all his own way, that he cannot submit to any thing like competition or a struggle for the mastery; he must lay on all the blows and take none. He is bullying and co-

wardly; a Big Ben in politics, who will fall upon others and crush them by his weight, but is not prepared for resistance, and is soon staggered by a few smart blows. Whenever he has been set upon he has slunk out of the controversy. The Edinburgh Review made (what is called) a dead set at him some years ago, to which he only retorted by an eulogy on the superior neatness of an English kitchen-garden to a Scotch one. I remember going one day into a bookseller's shop in Fleet-street to ask for the Review; and on my expressing my opinion to a young Scotchman, who stood behind the counter, that Mr. Cobbett might hit as hard in his reply, the North Briton said, with some alarm—"But you don't think, Sir, Mr. Cobbett will be able to injure the Scottish nation?" I said I could not speak to that point, but I thought he was very well able to defend himself. He however did not, but has borne a grudge to the Edinburgh Review ever since, which he hates worse than the Quarterly. I cannot say I do.

Mr. Cobbett speaks almost as well as he writes. The only time I ever saw him he seemed to me a very pleasant man—easy of access, affable, clear-headed, simple and mild in his manner, deliberate and unruffled in his speech, though some of his expressions were not very qualified. His figure is tall and portly. He has a good sensible face—rather full, with little grey eyes, a hard, square forehead, a ruddy complexion, with hair grey or powdered; and had on a scarlet broad-cloth waistcoat with the flaps of the pockets hanging down, as was the custom for gentlemen-farmers in the last century, or as we see it in the pictures of members of Parliament in the reign of George I. I certainly did not think less favourably of him for seeing him.

Haslitt's Table Talk.

MR. COBBETT.

OUR political contemporaries have done justice to the memory of this extraordinary man. But it would be taking a very narrow view of his character, to consider him merely as a politician. We are, indeed of opinion, that politics was a subject which he did not cordially like, and that it was the mere accident of fortune that made him a political writer. Every one at all conversant with his writings, must have observed the passionate yearnings with which, at all times, he turned towards the country—to rural life, to country sports, and even country labour; and in the touching announcement in the last *Register*, we see the ruling passion strong in death:—"On Thursday night last (June 11th.) he felt unusually well, and imprudently drank tea in the open air, but he went to bed apparently in better health. In the early part of the night he was taken violently ill, and on Friday and Saturday was considered in a dangerous state by the medical attendant. On Sunday he revived again, and on Monday gave us hope that he would yet be well. He talked feebly, but in the most collected and sprightly manner upon politics and farming; wished for 'four days rain' for the Cobbett-corn and the root crops; and, on Wednesday, *he could remain no longer shut up from the fields, but desired to be carried round the farm*; which being done, he criticised the work that had been going on in his absence, and detected some little deviation from his orders, with all the quickness that was so remarkable in him. On Wednesday night (June 17th.) he grew more and more feeble, and was evidently sinking; but he continued to answer with perfect clearness, every question that was put to him. In the last half hour his eyes became dim; and at ten minutes after one, p.m., he leaned back, closed them as if about to sleep, and died without a gasp." Indeed, the pictures of rural life and scenery scattered over his works, are among the freshest and most delightful in the language; he wrote on such subjects with the passion of a first love; the reader feels the breeze blowing on him, he smells the heather or the young hawthorn, and hears the birds singing around him; there is nothing said or done for effect—truth and beauty were to Cobbett identical; and there is a homely vigour in his style, which is perfectly delightful in this age of artificial refinement and delicate no-meaning. These papers were subsequently collected into a volume, entitled 'Rural Rides,' and, weary as we often are of all books, we never take it up without feeling ourselves refreshed in spirit.

But it is, unfortunately, impossible to consider Mr. Cobbett as a writer, or to test his character, without reference to the all-engrossing subject of politics; and here, we are of opinion, that his weakness as well as his strength becomes immediately manifest. We say it without political prejudice either way, and with an intimate knowledge of his writings, that Mr. Cobbett was, in our opinion, essentially a man of the age—one who received an impress from, rather than gave it. Though, for a time, he occupied a larger space than perhaps any other man in public opinion, we doubt whether his memory will outlive his generation. He had, indeed, a giant's strength, but squandered it like a child.

Mr. Cobbett was, as is well known, a self-educated man, and therefore, perhaps, for they usually run together, somewhat self-willed; he knew well the road he had travelled, the means by which he had acquired knowledge, and could not believe there was any other open to other men;—hence his attacks on Shakespeare and Milton, and schools and colleges. He had no fine and universal sympathies; knew nothing of the qualifying influences which make men what they are; and, therefore, every thing and person opposed to his own peculiar views, opinions, and prejudices, was not only wrong, but hateful. In this weakness lay much of his strength; his undoubting mind, and the narrow sweep of his intellectual vision, made all things within its range clear, palpable, and almost tangible; he could, accordingly, place his own views before the reader more forcibly than perhaps any man that ever lived.

It has been remarked, that Mr. Cobbett went on for thirty or more years harping everlastingly on the same theme without becoming wearisome; but was not this attributable to the fact, that he had never mastered a subject, or took a clear and comprehensive view of it? had it been otherwise, he must have exhausted it. We have, too, seen him compared to Thomas Paine, but, intellectually, no two men were ever more unlike. Paine grappled with his subject in its entirety; he hunted out all its involvements, and then said his say, and could only afterwards repeat himself. Cobbett took up an isolated point; it is true, that with his astonishing powers he made that point look like the whole, until, in the next or some subsequent Register he himself stumbled on another, and then the unimportance of the former was manifest enough: such a man, therefore, might write on till Doomsday. We say not this disparagingly, but apologetically; if we are right, it affords a master-key by which to explain what have been called Cobbett's inconsistencies—strange and incomprehensible without it. We had great

iration of Mr. Cobbett, but we knew him, or think we knew, in his strength and in his weakness; he was in many things valued, and ever will remain so; but as a mere political writer, is is inconceivable, except to those who have studied well, how little there is in all his voluminous works of original thought—of that which, it has been emphatically said, the world would not willingly let die.”

Copied from the Athenæum of June 27, 1835.

LIFE OF WILLIAM COBBETT, M. P.

1. COBBETT was a self-taught man in the true sense of the word. His father possessed a small piece of ground at Farnham, in Surrey, where Mr. Cobbett was born on the ninth of March, 1762; and brought up as a common agricultural labourer. In 1784, he quitted his father's roof, and repaired to London, where he succeeded in finding employment in the office of an attorney. Having enlisted as a common soldier, he was sent to Nova Scotia, and attained the rank of Sergeant-major. On the return of the army to England, he obtained his discharge with testimonials of good conduct during his service. He left England for France, where he remained six months, for the purpose of perfecting his knowledge of the French language, and sailed from a French port to the United States, where he maintained himself for some time by teaching English to Frenchmen. At that time the French, or democratic party in America, were loud in their abuse of England, and Mr. Cobbett was induced to espouse the cause of his mother country. He published a succession of pamphlets, under the assumed name of *Peter Porcupine*, written with great force and vivacity, some of which were reprinted at the time in England. In 1801 he returned to England and established a morning paper under the title of *The Porcupine*, in which he warmly supported Mr. Pitt. That paper, however, soon failed, and he afterwards set up *The Register*, which has been continued to the present time. Mr. Cobbett commenced his career as a public writer in England under very favourable circumstances. He was powerfully patronized by the ministry. Mr. Wyndham went even so far in the House of Commons as to declare that a statue of gold ought to be erected to him. His letters on the subject of the Treaty of Amiens produced a great sensation both here and on the Continent. Of this production it was said by the celebrated Swiss historian, Muller, that it was more eloquent

than any thing that had appeared since the days of Demosthenes. It is generally understood that Mr. Pitt gave offence in some way to Mr. Cobbett; for, on his return to power, Mr. Cobbett lost no opportunity of attacking his Ministry with great bitterness. His son has since contradicted this statement, but without assigning any other cause. Of Mr. Wyndham he long continued to speak favourably, but to him he became also hostile. From a Church and King man, Mr. Cobbett became in 1805 a Radical. In 1810 he was sentenced to two years imprisonment in Newgate, and a fine of 1,000*l*. From an idea that he would be deprived of his liberty, under the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, he left England for America in 1817, from whence he returned when the suspension terminated. It had long been a great object of his ambition to sit in the House of Commons, and after the passing of the Reform Bill he was twice returned for the great and populous borough of Oldham. Mr. Cobbett died at Normandy Farm, near Farnham, Surrey, on Thursday, June 18, aged 73.

P. S. In the various notices that have appeared in the Public Press, in reference to the death and character of Mr. Cobbett, I saw none that in any opinion appeared to take so just an estimate of the character of that extraordinary man as the Essay written many years ago by Mr. Hazlitt. Yet I differ in several respects from many of the opinions expressed in the Essay. The same will apply to the article copied from the *Athenæum*. Nearly all who have written on Mr. Cobbett neglect to mention one feature in his conduct, which ought to outweigh a multitude of errors—I mean, his uniform and consistent advocacy of the rights of the poor; his defence of labour, and its superior claim to the possession of good food, good clothing, and a comfortable domestic hearth, after the toils of the day were at an end.

He saw also, and portrayed in just but fearful vividness, that tendency to which the present system of society is leading its members; on the one hand—wealth, extravagance, and dissipation to the few; on the other—poverty, increasing labour, and wretchedness to the millions. He denounced it with a force and clearness that no other writer ever did. This service to mankind, ought to make the memory of William Cobbett revered and immortalized by the labouring people of all nations.

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